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## Spirit-Filled Mindfulness Through Lectio Divina

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## Spirit-Filled Mindfulness Through Lectio Divina

### Abstract

"*Lectio divina* is a Latin phrase meaning 'divine reading.' It is a historical, meditative, prayerful method of reading Scripture."

Posting about one of the spiritual disciplines from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<http://inallthings.org/spirit-filled-mindfulness-through-lectio-divina/>

### Keywords

In All Things, lectionary, Holy Spirit, Bible, meditation

### Disciplines

Christianity

### Comments

*In All Things* is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at Dordt College.

# Spirit-Filled Mindfulness Through Lectio Divina

 [all in allthings.org/spirit-filled-mindfulness-through-lectio-divina/](http://allthings.org/spirit-filled-mindfulness-through-lectio-divina/)

Shirley Folkerts

May 9,  
2017

“What’s that Bible-reading thing with the weird name?”

“*Lectio divina*?” I reply.

“Yes, that’s it!”

The name, like the practice, stands out as something different than “normal” Bible-reading. *Lectio divina* is a Latin phrase meaning “divine reading.” It is a historical, meditative, prayerful method of reading Scripture. In *lectio divina*, we do not approach the reading to see how much we can read or to gain intellectual information. Neither do we read in order to find the moral of the story or to realize answers to life’s questions. Instead, we engage the practice of *lectio divina* to meet with God and to be mindful of his presence in and among us.

Several years ago, I signed up to audit a college course called “Spiritual Formation Through *Lectio Divina*.” I had heard of *lectio divina*, and was intrigued by the connection between spiritual formation—the process of being formed into the likeness of Christ—and this meditative practice of reading Scripture. In *lectio divina*, we come to God’s Word to be with God, and in this presence we become open to the Holy Spirit’s transforming work in us.

Little did I know that this would be the beginning of one of the most meaningful seasons of spiritual growth in my life. Even less so did I realize that I had signed up to memorize Scripture passages each week! If you are not one to memorize Scripture, you should know that memorization is not a requirement for *lectio divina*, but it can certainly be part of the practice.

The class met on Tuesday and Thursday evenings for 90 minutes at a time. Tuesdays were normal; we learned about *lectio divina* and discussed its method, history, challenges, Scriptural support, etc. Thursdays, however, were much different.

On Thursdays, we gathered our chairs into a make-shift circle as we brought the fruit of our individual practice of *lectio divina* into the shared space of that upstairs, out-of-the-way classroom. One by one, each person recited the passage and read the prayer they had written as part of their *lectio* practice that week. Following each prayer, we sat still. There were no discussions, no questions, no explanations of why something was included or excluded in the prayer, and certainly no accolades. The instructor’s gentle “Amen” became the awaited cue for the next person to take their turn in the litany. The carpet in that room became holy ground. During the weeks when we were all assigned the same passage, we listened to its recitation 13-15 times, according to the number of people present that night. Instead of becoming tired of the repetition, we found that each person’s inflections brought unique nuances to the repeated passage and each prayer thickened the sacred presence among us.

The process of *lectio divina* traditionally includes four steps. Although *lectio divina* can be traced back to both the Jewish tradition of memorizing the Torah, as the New Testament instruction to “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Colossians 3:16a), and also fourth- and fifth-century monks seeking spiritual wisdom in the desert, the common Latin names for the four steps were assigned by a monk named Guigo II in the twelfth century. These Latin terms are *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio* and *contemplatio*. The English counterparts for these words are *reading*, *meditation*, *prayer* and *contemplation*. I gravitate to yet a third set of synonyms made easy to remember by their alliteration—*read*, *reflect*, *respond* and *rest*.

**Preparation.** In preparation for these four steps, settle into a quiet place and identify a passage. A few verses from a Psalm or a short story from the gospels are good possibilities. If you make *lectio divina* a regular practice, plan to read a few verses each day as you make your way through an entire book of the Bible. It is helpful to pause before

the reading to be mindful of your personal world. Acknowledge the primary joys and concerns in your life, or where your mental and emotional energy is currently directed. Our interaction with God and his Word may vary greatly, depending on what is going on in our lives. This mindfulness opens the door to acknowledge God's presence and receive his Word in the midst of our daily cares and concerns. Pray a brief prayer to acknowledge God's presence and express your desire to seek him through his word. Set aside any expectations and be open to him and the text.

**Lectio/Reading/Read.** Read the passage slowly and aloud, if possible. Re-read the passage several times with a prayerful attitude. If a word or phrase catches your attention, pause and let it soak in, without too much concern for why this word or phrase stands out. In this step, take notice of what the text actually says with no attempt at interpretation. Consider hand-writing the passage a few times in a journal.

**Meditatio/Meditation/Reflect.** At some point in the reading stage, we begin asking questions of the text. This indicates we have moved into the meditation and reflection stage of *lectio divina* in which we dig into the text and spend time with it. It may include memorizing the passage.<sup>1</sup>

**Oratio/Prayer/Respond.** As we spend time with the passage, there comes a point when our inquiry becomes conversation and we began dialoguing with the Author. The prayer flows from our engagement with the passage, and we may even find ourselves exploring a new perspective surrounding the concerns of life noted in our preparation for *lectio divina*. Sometimes the prayer is active and joyful while at other times it is slow or even imperceptible. During the prayer we may become aware, in the slightest way, of the transforming work of God's word, deep within our being.

**Contemplatio/Contemplation/Rest.** In the fourth stage we stop the reading, meditation and prayer, and we enter the mystery of Christ-in-me and me-in-Christ. Under the gaze of God, we rest, knowing that our hearts are touched by the Holy Spirit—whether we realize it or not, and we rest in the grace we have received.

*Lectio divina* takes us beyond ourselves, away from a self-centered faith and into an other-centered way of living the Christ-like transformation taking shape in us. The purposeful stages of *lectio divina* develop a Spirit-led mindfulness which seeps into every moment of our day, and somehow gives us an awareness of the Divine in every facet of life.

It has been nearly thirteen years since I audited that “Spiritual Formation Through *Lectio Divina*” class. To this day, I lean on those memorized words in my prayers and I sense that the mindfulness begun in that season of life is still producing Spirit-filled transformation deep within my soul.

## Dig Deeper

To learn more about *Lectio Divina* check out these books:

Enzo Bianchi, [Lectio Divina: From God's Word to Our Lives](#). (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2015.)

Michael Casey, [Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina](#). (Liguori, MO: Liguori/Triumph, 1996.)

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## Footnotes

1. For more on this step, refer to an earlier post by Jackie Smallbones, “[An Introduction to Christian Meditation](#).” ↩